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OLIVER LEE JACKSON



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The Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art
750 Marguerite Drive
Winston-Salem, North Carolina 27106

OLIVER LEE JACKSON

WAKE FOREST UNIVERSITY
SOUTHEASTERN CENTER FOR CONTEMPORARY ART
NORTH CAROLINA SCHOOL OF THE ARTS
ARTIST-IN-RESIDENCE PROGRAM

SPONSORED BY THE ROCKEFELLER FOUNDATION
18 OCTOBER — 23 NOVEMBER 1980


SOUTHEASTERN CENTER FOR CONTEMPORARY ART
WINSTON-SALEM, NORTH CAROLINA



foreword

Oliver Lee Jackson's exhibition at the Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art (SECCA) marks the fifth Winston-Salem residency of a nationally prominent artist. The program which brings Mr. Jackson to Winston-Salem is sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation and involves participation of three institutions: Wake Forest University, the Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art and the North Carolina School of the Arts. A three-year grant brings two artists-in-residence each year into the community. In addition to the two residencies annually, many more artists will visit Winston-Salem through the program.

The exhibition of Oliver Lee Jackson's paintings at SECCA represents his entry into the community and begins his residency in the Wake Forest University, Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art and North Carolina School of the Arts Artist-in-residence Program. The beginning of Mr. Jackson's residency also marks an exchange of ideas between artist and community and an enrichment of both.



*Vicki Cannon Kopf
Curator of Exhibitions
Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art*

introduction

By Regina Hackett

Oliver Jackson's paintings are intense, tactually rich environments of color and form. Even the most dramatic of them has a serene, trance-like quality in which time and gravity appear suspended.

Jackson is not trying to stop time and suspend gravity in his work in order to dazzle us with perceptual trickery. Instead he is preparing us for a mode of reality that is profoundly spiritual. He is attempting to portray the presence, flow and interaction of spiritual forces. These forces for him are fundamentally harmonious.

As potent and clear as these forces are in Jackson's paintings — we feel them flowing from the figures and emanating from the ground — they cannot be abstracted into words without radically distorting their character. In this sense the medium is the message and the form the function. Seeing the precisely tuned and emotionally sweeping spaces that make up the context of the paintings is the only way to understand their content.

"Powerful work is direct and feels right," says Jackson, "but it is not decipherable. My forms are not illustrations of feelings. The

paint is the form the feelings take when they come into the world. Paintings have moral implications only when they can make you stand in front of them and feel the urgency of their relationships."

Jackson's work comes squarely out of the Expressionist tradition. What Charles Cuttler described in *Northern Painting* as the interests in the 16th Century Northern Expressionists are Jackson's interests as well: "Light, air, forms in space, the appearance of things mystically lighted and mystically revealed."

The sense of interpenetrating object and ground in Jackson's work probably owes as much to the Cubists and the Abstract Expressionists, notably De Kooning, as it does to African tribal art. One of the essential characteristics of African art is a sense of vital forces flowing out into the world. In *The Primal Vision*, J.V. Taylor called this flowing a feeling of selfhood "...spilling beyond the confines of the experiencing body and echoing back again from other selves. . .interpenetrating. . .in a relationship in which subject and object are no longer distinguishable."

Jackson's figures also flow beyond their confines. They are formed to move with or give focus to the space of the ground. Says Jackson: "The figures are made in the same way the field is and delineate themselves according to what the paint will allow."

The paintings in this show were done in 1978 and 1979. They are a departure from the multi-layered, polished paintings Jackson did in 1977. In earlier canvases, Jackson rolled layers of luminous color on top of each other. He rubbed certain sections down until he got a lit, atmospheric translucence through which his figures could be both obscured and revealed.

In the paint he embedded rainbows of reflector tape, apexes and columns of gold leaf, tactually-enriching old paint chips, studs and beaded orbs. He buried sections of string, painted over them and pulled them out to reveal unfolding interior colors.

The 1978-79 canvases are more visceral and direct. They are done fast, with wet on wet technique. Working on the floor and moving down from the top of each canvas, Jackson thatches

heavy paint strokes into massive fields of color and form. As he moves down he allows sections of field to slide into broad, breathing expanses of open ground. The figures animate not only the heavily painted ground around them but the open area as well, charging it with the currents of their interactions.

Many of Jackson's 1977 figures are partially buried, almost subliminal. They appear to rise through layers of paint. The figures in the more recent canvases tend to be larger and more clearly revealed. Who they are is never in doubt: heralds or sacred figures blowing trumpets, powerful civilizing forces, generative sexual forms.

In many 1978-79 canvases, letters and numbers track a myriad of interwoven messages into the field. In *Untitled #6*, for instance, the lettering spells out versions of the name, Oliver Lee Jackson, plus I re-volt, I love, I re-veal.

Jackson uses these looping vowels and consonants, the foundations of speech, as underpinnings for the massive

grounds of his painting. The letters both merge with the field and serve it as structural supports.

"I do try to get cohesion and harmony from every aspect of what I do with paint," says Jackson. "I want a harmony that exceeds logic."

Jackson is a visionary painter. His work is rooted in his understanding of the irreducible spiritual nature of the world and his masterful ability as a painter to convey the profundity of his vision. While the power of what he paints is well beyond the comprehension of our rational minds, it can be understood through the nerve endings of feeling. Through looking you can let it take you.

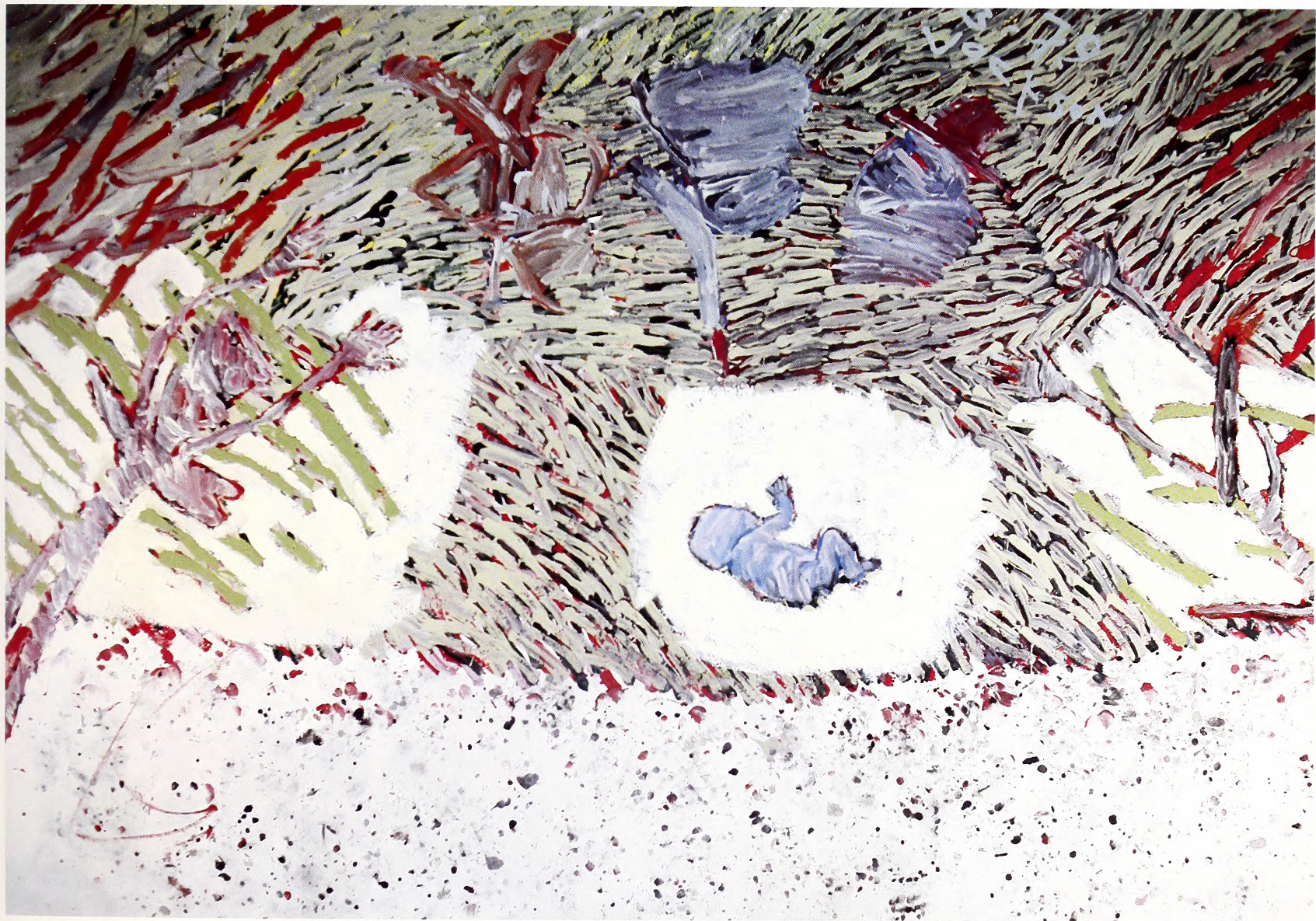
Regina Hackett is a visual arts reporter for The Seattle Post Intelligencer in Seattle, Washington



UNTITLED NO. 6 1978



UNTITLED NO. 8 1979



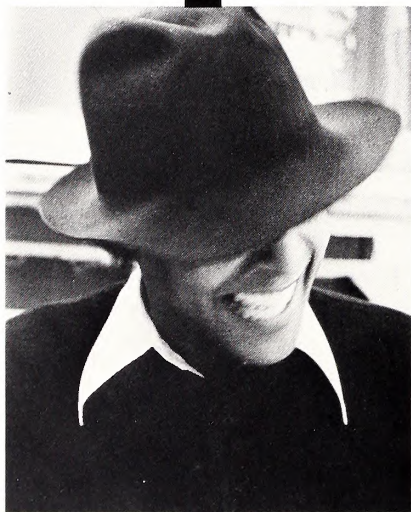
UNTITLED NO. 9 1979



UNTITLED NO. 10 1979



UNTITLED NO. 11 1979



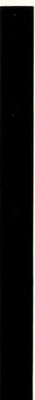
Gloria Jackson photo

Oliver Lee Jackson teaches at California State University in Sacramento. He is represented by Allan Stone Gallery in New York, New York.



catalog of the exhibition

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|-----------------|------|----------------------|-------------------------|
| Untitled No. 6 | 1978 | Oil enamel on canvas | 207 × 272 centimeters |
| Untitled No. 7 | 1978 | Oil enamel on canvas | 208 × 274.2 centimeters |
| Untitled No. 8 | 1979 | Oil enamel on canvas | 208 × 282 centimeters |
| Untitled No. 9 | 1979 | Oil enamel on canvas | 207 × 325 centimeters |
| Untitled No. 10 | 1979 | Oil enamel on canvas | 207 × 302.7 centimeters |
| Untitled No. 11 | 1979 | Oil enamel on canvas | 207 × 303.2 centimeters |



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